

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 11919

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: US CI PINT
SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS GETTING UPPITY AGAIN

REF: A) SANTIAGO 11544; B) SANTIAGO A-147

1. SUMMARY: EMBOLDENED BY WHAT THEY SEE AS A WEAKENING IN THE GOC'S POSITION, THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS ARE ASSERTING THEMSELVES SOMEWHAT MORE. THEY NO LONGER FEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY (THE "RECESS") WILL BE STRENGTHENED, AS PRESIDENT PINOCHET HAD PROMISED IN HIS SEPTEMBER 11 SPEECH. END SUMMARY.

2. A SENIOR CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC (PDC) LEADER, RAFAEL MORENO, TOLD US THE PDC BELIEVES THAT THE GOC IS NOW IN A WEAKER POSITION. HE ASCRIBES THE RELATIVE WEAKNESS TO REVULSION RESULTING FROM THE LETELIER ASSASSINATION (WHETHER OR NOT THE GOC WAS IMPLICATED IN THE DEATH) AND TO CARTER'S ELECTION; IT WAS MANIFESTED IN THE GOC'S MASS LIBERATION OF DETAINEES IN NOVEMBER. THUS, PARTY LEADERS THINK THAT PINOCHET HAS DISCARDED HIS SEPTEMBER 11 THREAT TO MAKE LIFE MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE PDC, AND AFTER THE DETAINEE RELEASE THEY NO LONGER FEEL THE HEAVY THREAT OF DIRECT REPRESSION OVER THEM. MORENO SAID PARTY MEMBERS HAVE TAKEN SUCH HEART THAT THE LEADERSHIP IS HAVING TO RENT MORE OFFICE SPACE. HE REALIZED THE DANGERS
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OF PROVOKING THE GOVERNMENT AND SAID THE PARTY INTENDED TO BE ASSERTIVE BUT CAREFUL.

3. THE RETURN OF PDC CONFIDENCE IS SEEN IN TWO CURRENT INCIDENTS. IN ONE, READERS OF "EL MERCURIO" DECEMBER 15 WERE SURPRISED TO SEE A LETTER FROM PDC INTERIM PRESIDENT

ANDRES ZALDIVAR THAT WAS SHARPLY AND IRONICALLY CRITICAL OF ECONOMY MINISTER SERGIO DE CASTRO. THE LATTER HAD GONE OUT OF HIS WAY TO ATTACK THE PDC AND THE FREI GOVERNMENT AT A PUBLIC MEETING A COUPLE OF DAYS BEFORE. HE ACCUSED THE PDC OF CRITICIZING PRESENT ECONOMIC POLICY BUT OF HAVING FAILED WHEN IT WAS IN POWER (IT LEFT "23 PERCENT OF CHILEANS LIVING IN EXTREME MISERY"), AND HE REPEATED THE STANDARD CHARGE THAT FREI'S GOVERNMENT HAD ONLY BEEN A TRANSITION TOWARD "PRO-SOVIET COMMUNISM."

4. THE BULK OF ZALDIVAR'S REPLY WAS A CITATION OF MANY INDICATORS SHOWING HOW MUCH BETTER OFF CHILE WAS IN 1970 THAN NOW--A SOMEWHAT DISINGENUOUS POINT. HE ALSO TOOK A POKE AT FINANCE MINISTER CAUAS, WHO--THEN A CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT--HAD ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITIES DURING THE FREI GOVERNMENT. ZALDIVAR CONCLUDED BY TURNING THE ECONOMIC ARGUMENT (ECONOMIC CRITICISM IS OFFICIALLY PERMITTED) INTO A POLITICAL ONE: GIVEN THE CHANCE TO CHOOSE, CHILEANS WOULD PREFER THE SITUATION OF 1970 TO THAT NOW. CAUAS AND DE CASTRO REPLIED THE NEXT DAY, CAUAS CALMLY BUT DE CASTRO SHARPLY POLEMICAL. THE LATTER NOTED THAT THE FREI GOVERNMENT HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO EFFECT MAJOR NECESSARY REFORMS, WHICH THE JUNTA HAD CARRIED OUT, AND THAT ZALDIVAR IN COMPARING 1970 AND 1976 HAD NEGLECTED TO MENTION ALLENDE'S DESTRUCTION OF THE ECONOMY AND THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CRISIS. IN CONCLUDING, DE CASTRO ALSO ABANDONED THE ECONOMIC ARGUMENT FOR THE POLITICAL: PERHAPS THE ONLY USEFUL RESULT OF ZALDIVAR'S LETTER WAS TO SHOW THE COUNTRY THE KIND OF PETTY POLITICAL DEMAGOGUERY CHARACTERISTIC OF THE OLD SYSTEM, WHICH "HAPPILY TODAY CHILE HAS BURIED." SECRETARY GENERAL OF GOVERNMENT GENERAL BEJARES ENDED THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PUBLIC CONTROVERSY BY CALLING ZALDIVAR IN AND ISSUING A STATEMENT BACKING THE MINISTERS. THE STATEMENT POLITELY INCLUDED ZALDIVAR'S ASSERTION THAT HE STOOD BY HIS POSITION BUT AGREED TO END THE ARGUMENT.

5. THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS ARE ALSO TRYING TO EMBARRASS THOSE WHO ARE TRYING TO EMBARRASS THEM OVER EX-AMBASSADOR KORRY'S CHARGES OF TAKING BRIBES (REF A). IN THEIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST KORRY THEY ARE HIGHLIGHTING A PHRASE OF HIS TAKEN FROM A TELEPHONE TALK WITH THE PARTY'S RADIO BALMACEDA, TO THE EFFECT THAT HIGH RANKING LEADERS OF EVERY CHILEAN GOVERNMENT IN THE PAST 20 YEARS, INCLUDING THE PRESENT ONE, HAVE TAKEN MONEY FROM ABROAD.

6. COMMENT: THESE MINOR INCIDENTS ARE SIGNIFICANT ONLY IN THAT THEY SHOW HOW THE OPPOSITION WILL MOVE IN AS THE GOVERNMENT RELAXES AND THE THREAT OF HARSH ACTION AGAINST DISSIDENTS APPEARS LESS IMMEDIATE. CHRISTIAN

DEMOCRATIC MOODS HAVE SHIFTED FREQUENTLY SINCE THE 1973 COUP. THEIR FEELINGS OF SECURITY AND APPREHENSION HAVE VARIED WITH THE PERCEIVED THREAT FROM THE GOVERNMENT. THEY HUNKERED DOWN AFTER PINOCHET WARNED SEPTEMBER 11 THAT HE WOULD TOUGHEN THE BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY (REF B). NOW THEY ARE A BIT COCKY. NEVERTHELESS, WE BELIEVE GOC HARDLINERS WILL BE WATCHING TO SEE THAT THE SITUATION DOES NOT GET OUT OF HAND.
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